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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NB, CA/VO AND H

H PLEASE PASS TO CONGRESSMAN SENSENBRENNER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CODEL SENSENBRENNER DISCUSSES VISA WAIVER PROGRAM
IN LITHUANIA

1. Summary: Congressman F. James Sensenbrenner, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, discussed Lithuania's Visa Waiver Program (VWP) prospects and expressed U.S. appreciation for Lithuania's support in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in meetings with President Adamkus and other senior officials during his January 10-12 visit to Lithuania. After receiving a briefing on Lithuanian passport security, which he pronounced as "among the best in the world," and a visit to the Belarus border, the congressman praised Lithuania's performance in meeting many of the Visa Waiver Program's criteria. But he also noted continuing problems with a high visa refusal rate for Lithuanians. While stating that the USG would not change its visa waiver laws to accommodate foreign policy concerns, he said Lithuania would receive positive consideration for inclusion in the program when it meets the program's legal requirements. The Congressman's visit afforded an excellent opportunity to keep the Lithuanian government and public focused on the Visa Waiver Roadmap for Lithuania. End Summary.

Congressman Sensenbrenner's Message

2. Congressman Sensenbrenner traveled with Judiciary Committee Chief of Staff Philip Kiko to Vilnius January 10-12 for meetings with President Adamkus, Prime Minister Brazauskas, Parliamentary Speaker Paulauskas, Interior Minister Furmanavicius and senior consular officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

3. Congressman Sensenbrenner's consistent message on the VWP was that the United States has not considered and will not consider foreign policy when determining participation in the VWP. He acknowledged that Lithuanian and Polish visitors to the United States would not compromise homeland security. At the same time, Rep. Sensenbrenner argued that granting VWP to those countries on political grounds would compel the USG to grant it to Kuwait, which he said is doing "just as much" for U.S. interests in the war on terror but because of national security considerations "cannot" be allowed to get VWP status.

4. The Congressman urged Lithuania to follow through on the Visa Waiver Roadmap established last year to help it meet the VWP's legal criteria. Commenting on one of these criteria, he complimented Lithuania on its efforts to produce secure identity documents, including incorporation of biometrics, stating that Lithuania has some of the most secure documents in the world. On another of the criteria, he emphasized that the visa application refusal rate must decline dramatically before Lithuania can be considered for inclusion in the VWP. In anticipation of Lithuania's planned accession to the Schengen Accord next year, he also sought to evaluate the availability to Lithuanian law enforcement of EU data on lost and stolen passports and mala fide travelers. The Congressman said that when Lithuania meets the Visa Waiver Program's requirements, he would be confident it would receive positive consideration for participation.

5. In his meetings, Rep. Sensenbrenner thanked Lithuania for its support of U.S. foreign policy objectives, especially in the war on terror. He commended Lithuania for its democratic and economic progress since independence, and its role in promoting the same throughout the former Soviet Union. As one of the keynote speakers at a parliamentary conference commemorating fifteen years of Lithuanian independence, he emphasized these themes as well as U.S. support for Lithuania's freedom over the years.

Lithuanian Reaction

6. Lithuanian interlocutors were keen to hear Congressman Sensenbrenner's perspective on the VWP. They confirmed their willingness to participate in the VWR, and were quick to point out their economic progress, as well as their efforts on document security. They stressed Lithuania's

support for U.S. foreign policy initiatives and thanked the USG for its support on a number of fronts, especially on relations with Russia and regional democratization, though they understood his message on VWP eligibility.

Press Coverage

17. The Lithuanian press showed considerable interest in Congressman Sensenbrenner's visit. Reporters' questions in stand-ups at the Presidency and the Parliament focused on the VWP. Reporting to date in both national and regional newspapers has accurately and positively relayed his comments regarding the VWP, a subject regularly addressed in the Lithuanian press. Post also arranged for an interview with the country's top weekly magazine, Veidas. The interview, also focused on the VWP, is scheduled to appear in the magazine's January 19 edition.

Comment

18. Congressman Sensenbrenner's visit and message afforded an excellent opportunity to keep the Lithuanian public focused on the Visa Waiver Roadmap and encouraged the GOL to continue its domestic efforts to meet VWP criteria. The unequivocal and consistent message also relayed support for our joint efforts with the GOL to meet legal criteria rather than dwell on political considerations.

19. CODEL Sensenbrenner did not have an opportunity to clear this message.
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